

# Lower Gila River Collaborative: A Subregional Collaborative Approach with Strategic Prioritization and Standardized Practices

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Wildlife Program Manager  
Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management



The Rio Reimagined

# Outline



- **Collaboration** on the lower Gila River - past and present
- **Recent Milestones** in projects and partnerships, studies, techniques and monitoring, funding
- **On the Horizon** for the Lower Gila River Collaborative



- LGRC partners are part of the larger Rio Reimagined revitalization effort
- Rio Reimagined is one of 21 federal Urban Waters Partnership projects
- RIO and LGRC are coordinated and aligned

**A NETWORK OF RESOURCES**

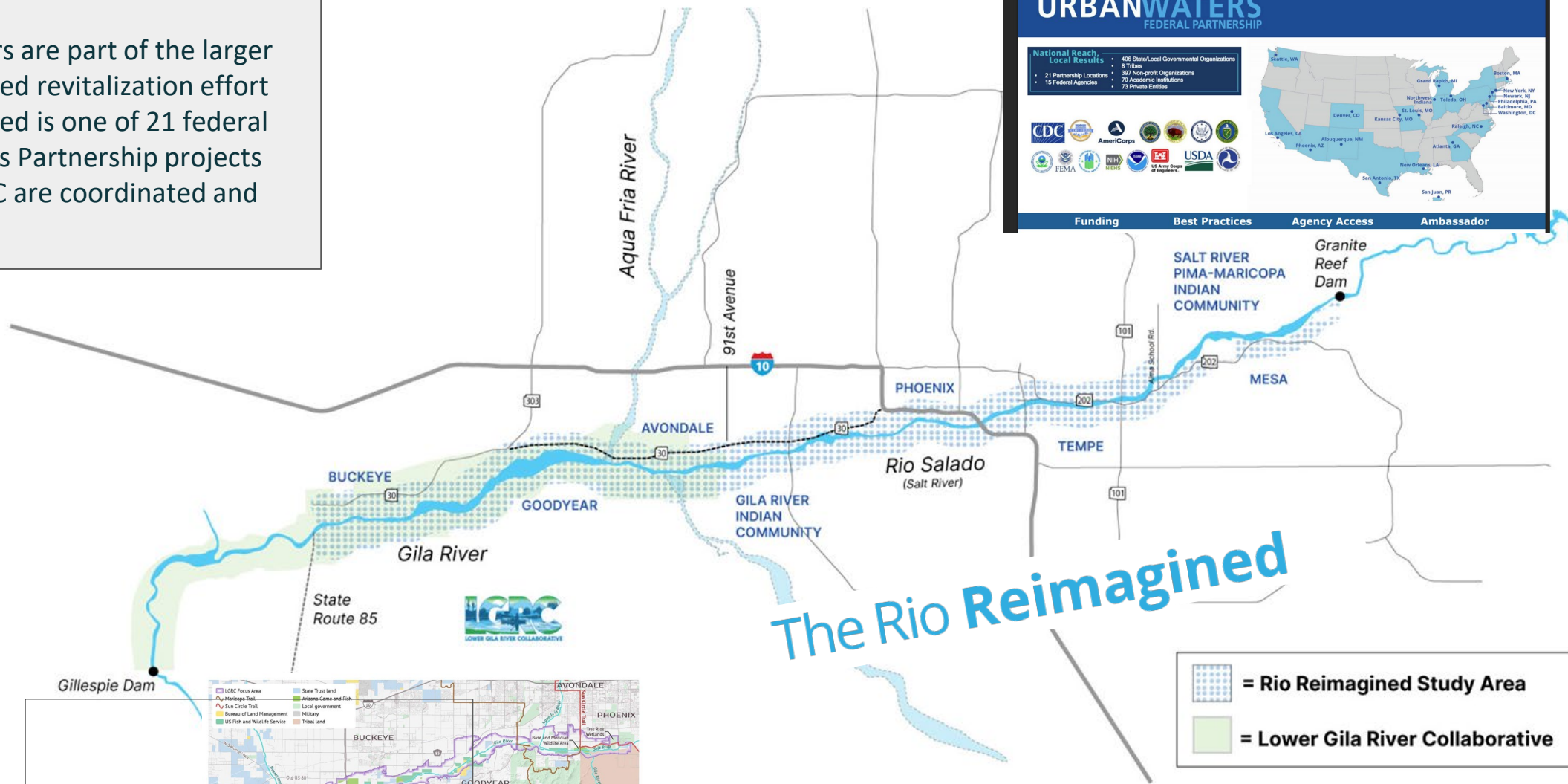
**URBANWATERS**  
FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

**National Reach, Local Results**

- 406 State/Local Governmental Organizations
- 8 Tribes
- 297 Nongovernmental Organizations
- 70 Academic Institutions
- 15 Federal Agencies
- 73 Private Entities

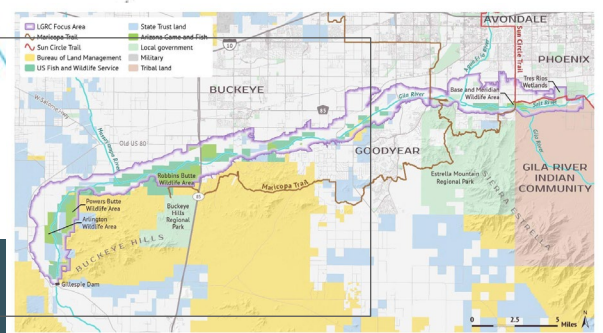
**Funding**    **Best Practices**    **Agency Access**    **Ambassador**

Logos for CDC, FEMA, NIH, USDA, and other partner agencies.



= Rio Reimagined Study Area

= Lower Gila River Collaborative

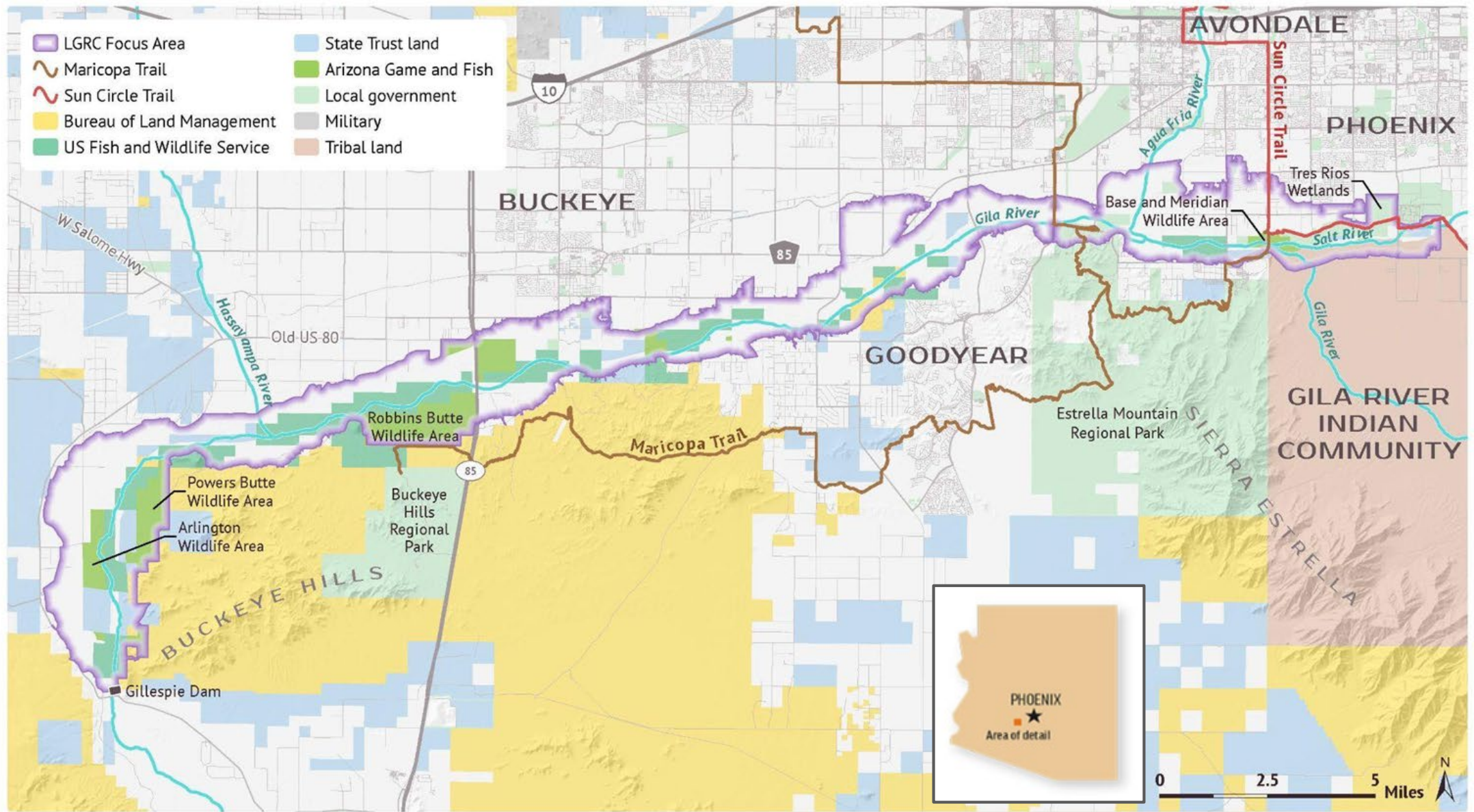


Lower Gila River  
MARICOPA COUNTY, ARIZONA

Logos for LGRC and TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND.



The Rio Reimagined



# Lower Gila River

## MARICOPA COUNTY, ARIZONA

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## Vision

A healthy Lower Gila River system with sufficient water resources to support functioning habitat, engaged and resilient communities, vibrant local economies and quality of life for present and future generations.

## Mission

To serve as an ongoing forum for collaboration, coordination and outreach that benefits natural and cultural resources of the Lower Gila River corridor.

## Goals



### Enhance

Enhance ecological function, habitat, and connectivity



### Support

Identify viable water sources of adequate quality and quantity to support efforts



### Connect

Strengthen community connections to the lower Gila River



### Mitigate

Reduce negative impacts of flood and fire to the natural and built environment

# Structure

## Core Funding Partners



# Background Conditions

- Dominated by **invasive tamarisk** or salt cedar
- Tamarisk grow in dense thickets, **changing river hydrology**, flooding farms and public spaces, limiting river access
- Tamarisk **burn intensely** in riparian areas not adapted to fire
- The river is home to **unique wildlife** and protected species
- The river offers **recreation opportunities** like regional trails, parks, and lakes



# Milestones 2024-2025

- Public outreach
- Projects and Partnerships
- Plans and Guides
- Monitoring and Maintenance
- Funding and organizational support

**Overall LGRC Progress Measures**

- 276 acres of non-native vegetation removed/managed
- 71 acres treated/seeded for native vegetation
- 450 native tree tall pots planted
- 200+ volunteers engaged
- Reached 3,600+ community members at 7 outreach events

**Increased Funding for Projects & Capacity**

- Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART grant (\$300k) for Strategic Action Plan Implementation
- RESOLVE drone support (\$150k) for equipment and training
- Bureau of Reclamation Bucket 3 Grant application for operations & maintenance
- WRDA 2024 authorization for Tres Rios recreation & ecosystem restoration

**Vegetation Management & New Partnerships**

- Tamarisk removal on agricultural properties with private landowners
- RIO Corridor Invasive Species Plan for the Salt/Gila Corridor

**Recreation, Quality of Life & Outreach**

- Goodyear & Buckeye Parks and Recreation Master support
- New amenities at Estrella Mountain in Regional Park
- Hunting & fishing opportunities at Robbins Butte
- New Avondade AGFD agreement for Tres Rios
- Expanded DFFM capacity for fuels reduction

**Outreach and Media Recognition**

- Tres Rios Nature Festival
- Nature Fest PHX
- Earth Day events
- Clean up events
- Tree planting with GRIC & SRP
- LGRC educational video

**Monitoring & Research Improve Project Success**

- LGRC's collaborative monitoring plan
- Water Quality and Quantity Study with USGS

# Recent Milestones: Public Outreach

- Tamarisk removal along the lower Gila River by the Southwest Fire Consortium
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPLurmDEi60>
- Lower Gila River Collaborative website
  - [www.lowergilariver.net](http://www.lowergilariver.net)
- Events (Earth Day, Tres Rios Nature Festival, clean ups, Nature Fest Phoenix, etc.)



# Recent Milestones: Projects and Partnerships



**Estrella Pollinator Garden (2024),  
Maricopa County Parks & Recreation**



**Pre-treatment**



**Post-treatment**

November 2017

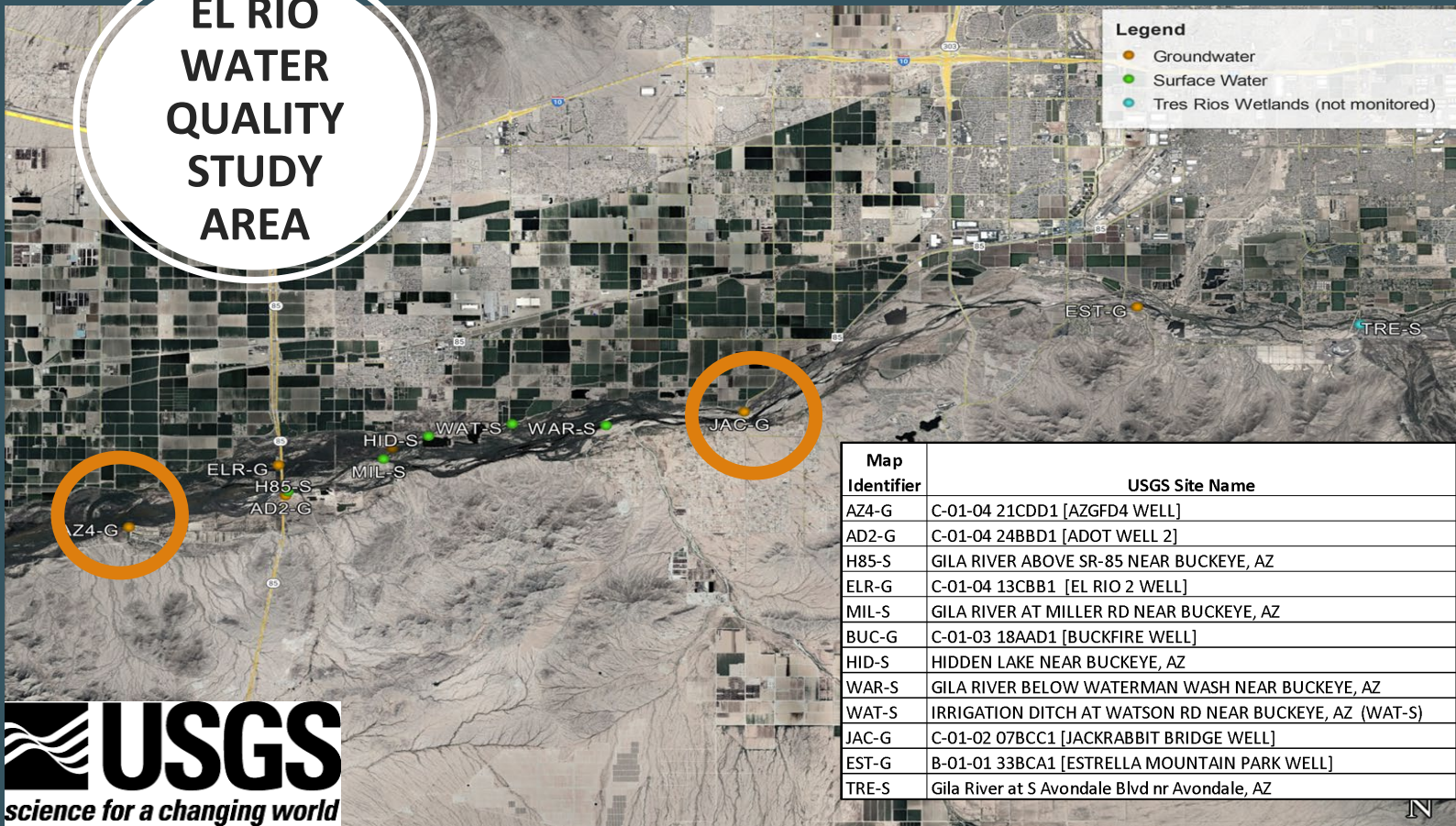


October 2021

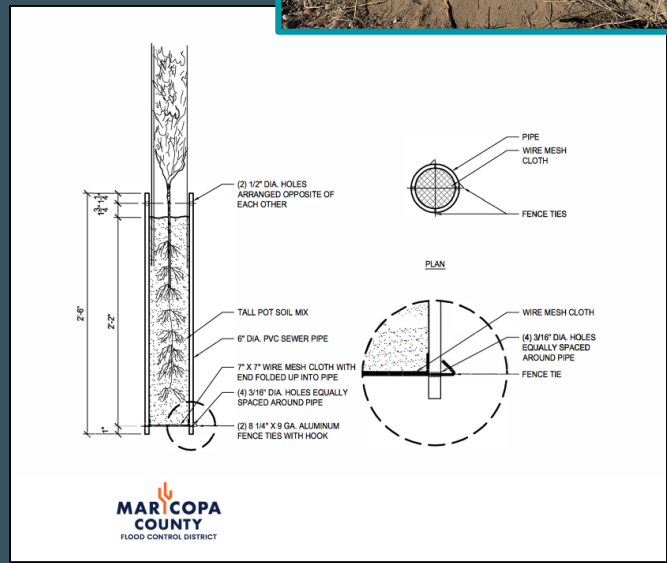


# Recent Milestones: Studies and Techniques

**EL RIO  
WATER  
QUALITY  
STUDY  
AREA**



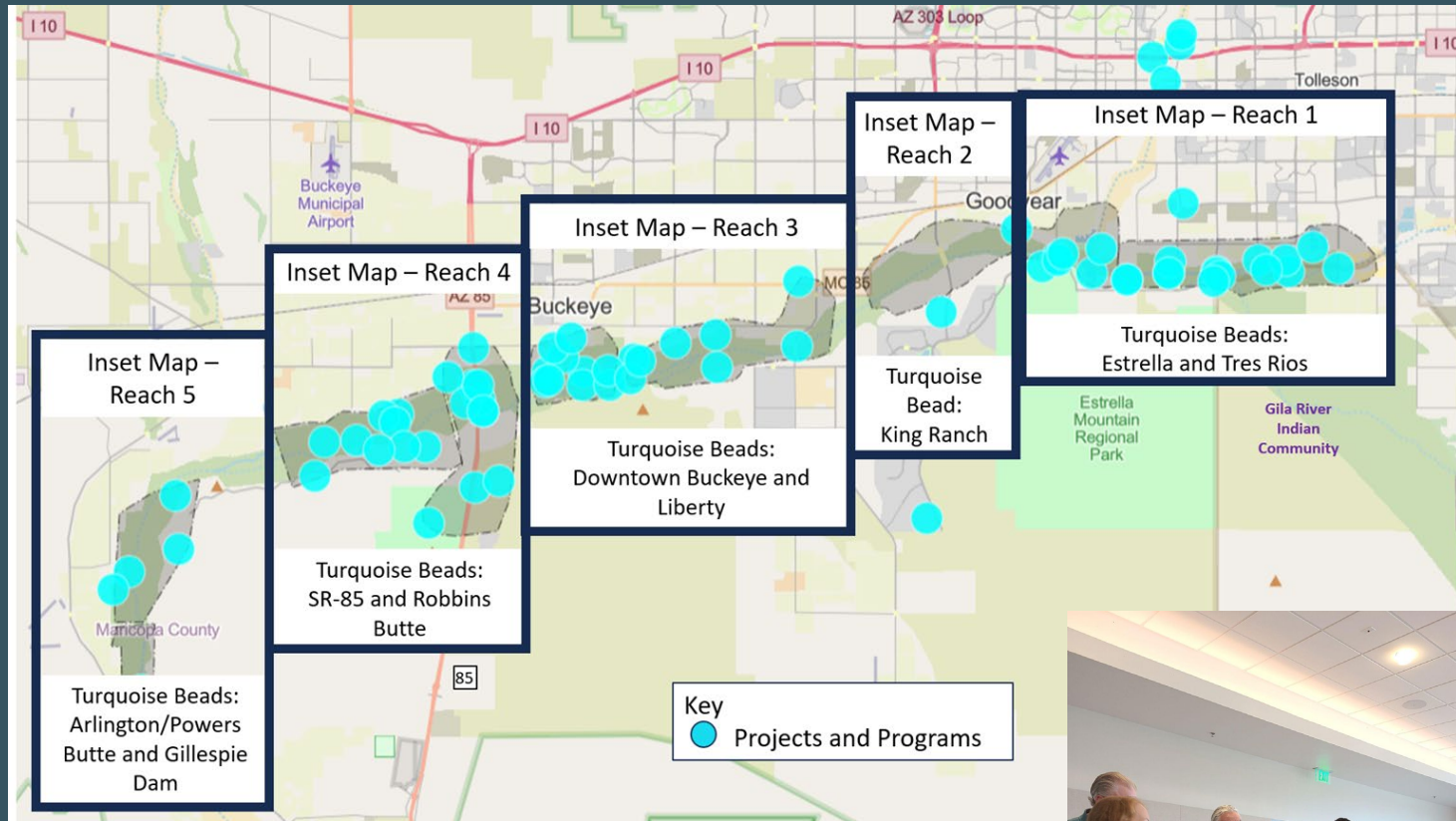
Map Identifier	USGS Site Name
AZ4-G	C-01-04 21CDD1 [AZGFD4 WELL]
AD2-G	C-01-04 24BBD1 [ADOT WELL 2]
H85-S	GILA RIVER ABOVE SR-85 NEAR BUCKEYE, AZ
ELR-G	C-01-04 13CBB1 [EL RIO 2 WELL]
MIL-S	GILA RIVER AT MILLER RD NEAR BUCKEYE, AZ
BUC-G	C-01-03 18AAD1 [BUCKFIRE WELL]
HID-S	HIDDEN LAKE NEAR BUCKEYE, AZ
WAR-S	GILA RIVER BELOW WATERMAN WASH NEAR BUCKEYE, AZ
WAT-S	IRRIGATION DITCH AT WATSON RD NEAR BUCKEYE, AZ (WAT-S)
JAC-G	C-01-02 07BCC1 [JACKRABBIT BRIDGE WELL]
EST-G	B-01-01 33BCA1 [ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN PARK WELL]
TRE-S	Gila River at S Avondale Blvd nr Avondale, AZ



Tallpot agreement (2025),  
Flood Control District of Maricopa County

Water Quality and Flow Study (2021-2025),  
USGS and FCDMC

# Recent Milestones: Plans and Guides



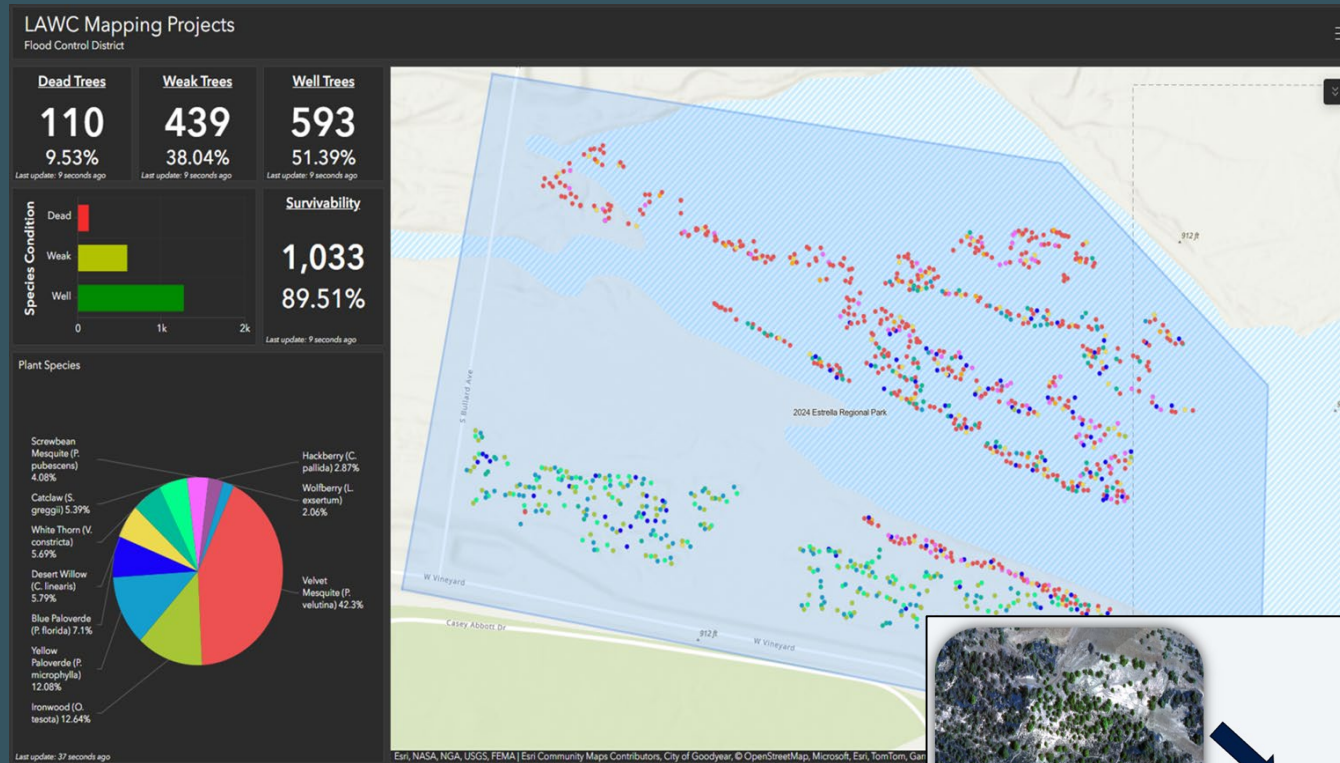
LGRC Strategic Action Plan (2024),  
Southwest Decision Resources



## What's in the Plan?

- Assessments of current ecological and social conditions
- Priority projects for vegetation, recreation, community engagement
- 10 strategies and concrete actions to meet LGRC goals
- Monitoring plan
- Roadmap for sustaining and growing collaboration

# Recent Milestones: Monitoring and Maintenance



Monitoring Tree Health, Maricopa County Flood Control District

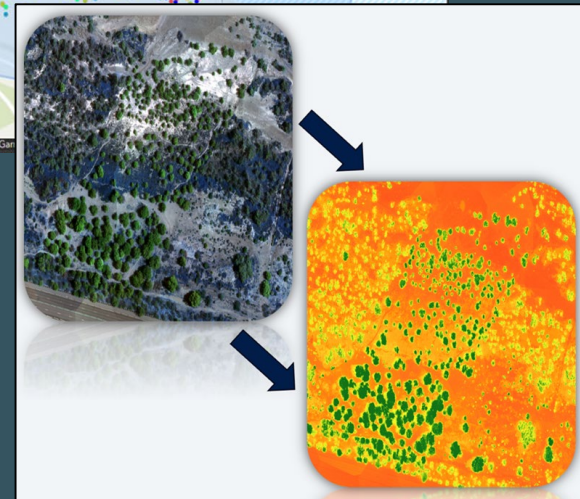
LGR: Floodplain Enhancement Planning & Implementation Guide

Table of Contents | **I. Overview** | II. Site Characterization | III. Planning & Implementation | IV. Goals, Objectives, Monitoring | V. Summary and Conclusion | VI. References & Resources

### What are the current habitat enhancement objectives in the Lower Gila?

- Improve and enhance habitat function along the Lower Gila River by restoring natural stream processes and riparian conditions in areas degraded by altered hydrology and invasive species.
- Control invasive species and promote native vegetation to increase biodiversity and improve habitat quality for native wildlife.

Floodplain Enhancement Guide (2026), Geosystems Analysis



Drone monitoring, multi-spectral imagery for project sites

# Recent Milestones: Funding



**WaterSMART**

Grant awarded to Audubon SW  
2024-2027

- ~\$300,000

**RESOLVE**

RESOLVE is working with  
Resolution Copper to fund nature  
conservation awarded to Audubon

- \$158,000 over five years

**ARIZONA**  
DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY  
& FIRE MANAGEMENT

State and federal wildfire  
mitigation funds

- 5.2 million since 2021

# On the Horizon

## LGRC:

- GIS Hub for data sharing, visualization
- Expanded community outreach and communications capacity
- Monitoring and Maintenance Plan for AZ Department of Forestry and Fire Management projects
- University of Arizona/AZ Department of Forestry and Fire Management use of drones for biomass estimation study

## Rio Reimagined:

- RIO Vision Plan
- MAG Active Transportation Plan
- Rio-wide Army Corps of Engineers Invasives Management Plan
- Rio Foundation/501c3
- AZ Cross-Watershed Network



# Thank you!

- Reach out to [lowergilariver@gmail.com](mailto:lowergilariver@gmail.com)



Tres Rios Nature Festival (2022), Base and Meridian Wildlife Area